

The Church, God, and You

Is church membership optional?

Acts 20.28

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • December 8, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2019

Scripture Reader and Reading: Nash Crisp – Ephesians 1.22–23

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Larry Amberg – Songs on the church

Prelude:

I. Paul told the Ephesians elders:

28 “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

– Acts 20.28

A. Remember what Paul said.

B. I’ll bring it back up later.

II. It is not unusual to hear Christians who have quit the church,

A. claim that they have not fallen away from God, or

B. that they still believe in Him, and

1. they might even claim to pray to Him still.

2. They believe that they still have a good relationship with Him, and

a) they believe that He supports their separation from the church.

b) They claim that they do not have any problems with God, but

(1) they will tell you something that they have against the church, or

(2) it might be someone specific that they have something against.

C. Or it might be as simple as they just do not want to make the commitment.

1. They want to sleep in on Sundays.

2. They want to go fishing or something else on the Lord’s Day.

3. They might want to continue doing what the church preaches against.

III. Is it true that we can ignore the church but still have a relationship with God?

- A. Can you fall away from the church but not from God?
- B. Can you fall away from the church and still expect God to hear your prayers?
- C. Is God okay with people ignoring the church?
 - 1. To every single one of those questions,
 - 2. I answer, No, and I will show you why.

IV. When someone dismisses the church, he dismisses many priceless truths.

Persuasion:

I. They Dismiss the Kingdom of God

- A. Jesus is King of kings.
 - 1. Kings have kingdoms.
 - 2. The church is the kingdom of Christ.
- B. How does He react to someone who says he doesn't need the kingdom?
 - 1. Jesus died to set up His kingdom.
 - 2. In John 18, He explained to Pilate the nature of the kingdom.
 - a) Jesus referred to His servants,
 - b) which would have been the apostles and other believers,
 - (1) all of whom became members of the church.

36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

– John 18.36

- (2) What makes people think they can ignore the kingdom here, but the they will be invited into the kingdom of heaven?

II. They Dismiss the Bride of Christ

- A. The church is the bride of Christ.
- B. Revelation 19 shows the greatest celebration ever.

1. The Lamb is marrying His bride:

7 “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

– Revelation 19.7–8

2. What will Jesus say to the people who wanted no part of His bride?

III. They Dismiss the Body of Christ

A. While on earth, the Father gave Jesus a body.

B. Jesus used that body

1. to do the will of God and
2. to serve the world.

C. When Jesus ascended to heaven,

1. He did not want to leave the earth without His body or His presence.
2. Therefore, He gave the world the church,
 - a) which is His body.
 - b) Colossians 1 makes that declaration:

18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

– Colossians 1.18

D. Can I claim allegiance to the head but ignore the body?

IV. They Dismiss Their Brethren

A. Have you given thought to how much of the Bible, and

1. especially the New Testament,
2. was written about our relationships with our brethren?

B. How then can I dismiss my fellow-members of the church?

1. In Matthew 22, after saying that loving God
2. is the first and great commandment,
 - a) Jesus then declared the second greatest commandment:

39 “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

– Matthew 22.39–40

- b) How then can I get away with not loving my brethren
- c) by not associating with them and working with them in the church?

V. They Dismiss All the Passages that Deal with Worship

A. First Corinthians 11–14 has many of those passages.

B. Consider one of the topics that comes up in that section,

1. where Paul assumes that Christians in the first century had a home congregation:

33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

– 1 Corinthians 11.33

2. He did not even consider the possibility of not associating with the church.

C. However, Hebrews 10 shows that as time went on,

1. ignoring the church did become a problem.
2. Therefore, the Hebrew writer had to make this statement:

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

– **Hebrews 10.24–25**

- a) How can a Christian do as that passage says
- b) by staying away from the church?

VI. They Dismiss Heaven

A. Most believers hang onto Revelation 21,

- 1. looking forward to all the glories revealed in that magnificent passage.
- 2. They fill their hearts with hope as they read
 - a) of streets paved with gold,
 - b) of entering the pearly gates,
 - c) of basking in the light of God.
- 3. However, have you taken a careful look at that passage?
 - a) Before John shows us those marvelous things,
 - b) he relates what an angel said to him:

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”

– **Revelation 21.9**

- (1) Did John then see a woman?
- (2) No, John saw a city:

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God...

– **Revelation 21.10**

- (a) The rest of the descriptions that you have read of that city,

(b) the 12 gates, the size (1,380 miles all three dimensions), street of gold, etc.,

i) pictures the church glorified in heaven.

ii) The Holy Spirit used many symbols to picture the church,

(1) a kingdom, a body, a woman, and

(2) He also used a city.

B. What makes a person think

1. that they can ignore the church on earth, but

2. he or she will be part of the church in heaven?

VII. They Dismiss the Death of Jesus Christ

A. Why did Jesus die on the cross?

1. If you answer that He died for our sins, you would be correct.

2. However, there is more to the answer.

B. When Jesus died on the cross He accomplished many things.

1. Obtaining the forgiveness of our sins is the greatest blessing, but

2. He did some other wonderful things.

C. Listen again to what Paul said in Acts 20

1. as he spoke with the elders of the Ephesian church for the last time.

2. He reminded them of his ministry among them, but

a) he also exhorted them to do the work of an elder.

b) Part of that exhortation are these words:

28 “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

– Acts 20.28

D. Their duties included

1. taking heed to themselves and
 2. taking heed to all the flock.
 - a) Paul reminded the Ephesian Elders of the magnitude of their job
 - b) by reminding them of the price that Jesus paid to purchase the church.
- E. In addition to dying for our sins,
1. Jesus also died to purchase the church.
 2. Everything that you have imagined that Jesus suffered on the cross,
 - a) for the forgiveness of your sins,
 - b) He also suffered to purchase the church.
 - (1) How significant does that make the church to Jesus?
 - (2) How much does He value the church?
- F. Now, tell me that you can have nothing to do with the church,
1. that church membership is not important or that it is only optional,
 2. that you only want a relationship with the Lord and
 - a) that you do not want anything to do with the church!
 - b) The ministry and the death of Jesus Christ was about the church!
 - (1) Are you prepared to tell Him
 - (2) that you do not think the church is necessary?
 - (a) Second Corinthians 5.10 says
 - (b) that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ:

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

– 2 Corinthians 5.10

Exhortation:

I. Do you want to go to the Judgment

- A. having dismissed or devalued
- B. what God has placed the highest value upon?
 - 1. Listen to what Jesus said, as found in Matthew 12.
 - 2. Those who dismiss the church
 - a) will have to answer Jesus for it.
 - b) He declared:

36 “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

– Matthew 12.36–37

II. Jesus died to make the church a reality.

- A. If I dismiss the church,
- B. I dismiss the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

III. If a person dismisses the death of Jesus,

- A. he dismisses the forgiveness of his sins.
- B. If a person dismiss the forgiveness of his sins,
 - 1. he has a massive problem in life,
 - 2. a problem with God!

IV. Therefore, this very day

- A. become a member of the blood-bought church
- B. by becoming a Christian.